

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 22, 2022

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

Thank you for your service during this challenging time. As Russia conducts a brutal war and commits widespread war crimes against the people of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin is leveraging another tool to achieve his political objectives: non-state groups engaged in terrorist activity. As the global community seeks to support Ukraine and ensure Putin's aggression fails, we must pursue every avenue to impose costs on his regime. Given the Russian government's support for non-state terrorist groups prior to and during the Ukraine conflict, we respectfully request that the State Department deliver an assessment to us on whether Russian meets the requirements to be designated as a state sponsor of terrorism.

Section 140 of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act in Fiscal Years 1988 and 1989 helps to define "international terrorism" as "terrorism involving citizens or the territory of more than 1 country" and "terrorism" as "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents." The Secretary of State is authorized "to designate a foreign government for repeatedly providing support for acts of international terrorism" through three statutes – Section 620A of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, Section 40 of the Arms Export Control Act, and Section 1754(c) of the Export Controls Act of 2018.¹ When a government is designated as a state sponsor of terrorism, the Secretary of State may "curtail aid or trade to that country."²

Russia harbors and sponsors terrorists. Jason Blazakis, the director of the State Department's Counterterrorism Finance and Designations Office in the Bureau of Counterterrorism from 2008 to 2018, wrote: "Russia provides sanctuary to a U.S.-designated terrorist group, the Russian Imperial Movement, which operates with impunity in Russian territory. It is a group that has trained terrorists to carry out an attack in Sweden, and it has served as a proxy force for Russia in Crimea."³ Reports allege that the Russian Imperial Movement's flag was flown by Moscow-backed separatists in Donetsk on March 15, 2022, indicating that this terrorist organization may have a current presence in Ukraine.⁴

¹ Dianne E. Rennack, "State Sponsors of Acts of International Terrorism," Congressional Research Service, May 4, 2021.

² Id.

³ Jason Blazakis, "The ultimate sanction: listing Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism," *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 2022.

⁴ Mark Townsend, "Russian mercenaries in Ukraine linked to far-right extremists," *The Guardian*, March 20, 2022.

Further, some reports indicate that Russia has recruited troops from the Wagner Group – a private military company with a history of committing human rights violations with the intention of terrorizing civilian populations – to fight alongside Russian troops in Ukraine. Human rights organizations and United Nations investigators have found that “Wagner troops have targeted civilians, conducted mass executions and looted private property in conflict zones.”⁵ Video recordings have shown Wagner soldiers in Syria “beating [a] victim with a sledgehammer, then dismembering and burning the body,” spurring human rights groups to take legal action in response.⁶

Given these human rights abuses, the Wagner Group’s reported presence in Ukraine is deeply concerning. Over the past few weeks, reports indicate the Wagner Group has increased its presence to over 1,000 troops in Donbas. Not only has Russia deployed Wagner troops in Ukraine and Syria, Wagner troops have also “exerted Russian influence” and likely committed rights abuses in Libya, the Central African Republic, Sudan, Mali, and Mozambique, primarily to suppress civilian populations and to prop up authoritarian governments.⁷ It is evident that Russia’s sponsoring of the Wagner Group has resulted in terrorizing civilians, and these actions must be addressed in the most timely manner possible.

If your assessment shows the requisite evidence for designating Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism, it would give the U.S. additional tools to reduce Russia’s war machine, further isolate Russia economically and diplomatically, and hold Russia accountable. Such a designation would potentially:

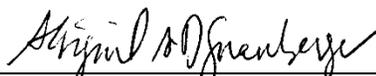
- Freeze Russia’s assets in the United States, including real estate;
- Cause the U.S. to veto efforts of Russia to secure World Bank or International Monetary Fund loans;
- Prohibit a wide variety of dual-use exports;
- Allow the U.S. to take economic action against countries that continue to do business with Russia.⁸

The free world has been shocked at Russia’s violent, barbarous acts against civilians. But we cannot ignore its use of non-state actors engaged in terrorist activity as a separate tool to achieve Putin’s political objectives. We urge you to promptly consider all evidence for a potential designation of Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism.

Sincerely,



TED W. LIEU
Member of Congress



ABIGAIL SPANBERGER
Member of Congress

⁵ Victoria Kim, “What is the Wagner Group?”, *New York Times*, March 31, 2022.

⁶ Andrew E. Kramer, “Grisly Killing in Syria Spawns Legal Case Against Russian Mercenaries,” *New York Times*, March 15, 2021.

⁷ Victoria Kim, “What is the Wagner Group?”, *New York Times*, March 31, 2022.

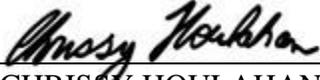
⁸ Jason Blazakis, “The ultimate sanction: listing Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 2022.



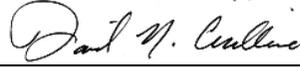
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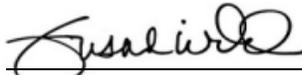
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